



# CHIKAMING OPEN LANDS

Spring 2025 Newsletter

- Venturing North: A New Preserve Campaign
- Making Memories at Robinson Woods
- Spring Events & Programs



# A LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT



Dear Members and Friends,

And so we grow! 2024 was another banner year for Chikaming Open Lands: a phenomenally successful benefit (thank you to our hosts, Janis Kanter & Tom McCormick); the opening of Myron Perlman Nature Preserve in Buchanan and Castle Keep

Preserve in New Buffalo; the acquisition of Trillium Woodlands Preserve in Niles and the Lakeside Woods property in Lakeside (in the latter case, thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor); further expansion of COL's popular community outreach programs; and a wonderful farm-to-table fundraising dinner at Granor Farm... to mention just some of the highlights. On behalf of the entire COL Board, a huge thank you to our devoted supporters, staff and volunteers! Our success is your success.

Looking forward to this coming year, I can share the news that we have identified a property which will become the "Founders Preserve" in honor of COL's founders, Jean & Steve Smith and Jeanie & Peter Van Nice, and specifically in memory of Peter, who passed away in 2022. More information on this new preserve will follow, but for now I can confirm that this property is in a prominent location right here in Chikaming Township.

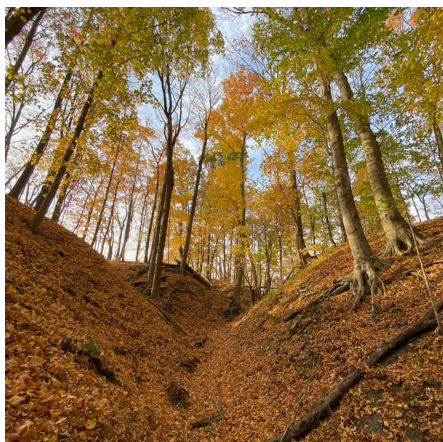
I'll leave you with my new favorite quote about nature, compliments of Margaret Atwood: "In the Spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt." It may not seem like it yet, but Spring IS on its way. We truly hope you will get outside, enjoy COL's preserves, and get a little freshly thawed dirt on your shoes!

With Gratitude,

Richard Spain  
President, Board of Directors

# VENTURING NORTH: A NEW PROPERTY IN ST. JOE

For our next conservation effort, we're setting our sights in a northerly direction... specifically, Royalton Township! Chikaming Open Lands is currently seeking to acquire a 33-acre property located off Bacon School Road in St. Joseph, right next to an existing protected natural area, the Royalton Township Nature Trail.



The parcel features a lovely mature hardwood forest, scenic ravines, and a former agricultural area. The current property owners, Thomas and Eileen Chapman, were ready to sell the land, but they also wanted to see it remain in its undeveloped, natural state. So they reached out to COL, offering the land to us at a significantly discounted price. It was an opportunity we did not want to pass up.



A red-backed salamander found on the property

COL is working with neighbors in the community surrounding the property in an effort to raise funds to purchase the Chapman parcel. Upon acquisition, we plan to build a trail system through the property, potentially connecting to the existing trails in the adjacent Royalton Nature Trail area; and complete a native prairie restoration in the old field.



# MAKING LASTING MEMORIES

**Everyone has their “happy place.”** It’s that truly special place where you feel the tension leave your body in one cathartic exhale of breath, your mind clears, and your sprits immediately lift.

For Pat and Ellie Mullins, Robinson Woods Preserve is one of those places.

We recently joined them for a hike to learn more about why natural places—like Robinson Woods—are so important to them.



Pat, Ellie & Boris Mullins

Almost as soon as we stepped into the preserve, Pat paused, gazing down the trail before him, and said wistfully, “This is probably our most-hiked trail of all time.” “Our favorite trail ever!” Ellie chimed in. Their nine-month-old son Ernie, strapped snugly to Pat’s back, seemed to agree.



Ernie at Robinson Woods

Bundled up like a teddy bear and sporting a relaxed grin and rosy cheeks, Ernie was ready for our hike. Ellie laughed as she recalled their first visit with Ernie: “I remember when we first brought him here in the stroller. As soon as the branches started showing up overhead, he got so excited and started squealing with joy. He genuinely loves trees!”



# MAKING LASTING MEMORIES

As we continued the hike, Pat and Ellie's deep connection to Robinson Woods was proven again and again--in the form of spirited anecdotes and memories detailed at every turn.

Ellie's phone holds thousands of photos documenting their time here, including one of their most cherished spots—a stump overlooking a ravine, now marked with a plaque that reads, “Up, up, up,” in memory of their dog, Tui.

“We called him Tui Robinson,” Ellie remembered. “Every time we passed here, we’d say ‘Up, up, up!’ and he’d jump up and walk across the three stumps that used to be here.”

**Year-round hikers,** Pat and Ellie have experienced Robinson Woods in every season. When asked about their favorite time to visit though, they found it impossible to choose. “I love spring when the leaves start to pop again,” Ellie said.



Tui on his log at Robinson Woods



Pat, Ellie, and Boris hiking in the snow

“Yeah, when everything gets green,” Pat agreed. “Or when you hear the bees buzzing as the flowers fill in,” Ellie added. “And fall, obviously,” Pat continued. “There’s this one spot where the trees open up—it looks like a cathedral.” Ellie jumped back in, “Oh, and when it snows—especially the wet, heavy kind that bends the branches into a tunnel. It’s magical when you’re the first person on the trail after a good snow.”

# MAKING LASTING MEMORIES

While Pat and Ellie enjoy having the trails all to themselves (who doesn't?), they also function as ambassadors for Robinson Woods. They help reroute lost hikers, introduce friends to the preserve, and bring extended family to the property. "We call this the Family Tree," Ellie said, pointing to a distinctive spot where a fallen tree sprouted new growth. "We've taken so many family pictures here!"

Stories like Pat and Ellie's are a reminder of the profound impact land conservation can have on the people in a community. Nature is where memories take root, creating deep connections that span generations. Protecting these spaces ensures that future generations can continue to experience and cherish them!

**Do you have a favorite trail, view, or resting spot in the woods? Share it with us at [col@chikamingopenlands.org](mailto:col@chikamingopenlands.org).**





# CREATE YOUR LEGACY

## **Leave a legacy that will preserve our cherished natural places FOREVER.**

Including Chikaming Open Lands (COL) in your estate plan is a wonderful way to create a lasting legacy and protect the unique natural, rural character of this special place for generations to come.

### **Ways to make your legacy gift:**

- Make a gift of cash, investments, or other assets to COL in your will or trust.
- Name COL as a beneficiary of your IRA or other retirement plan.
- Designate COL as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy.
- Make a gift of real estate to COL to be managed as a nature preserve, or to be sold with the proceeds supporting our work.

To learn more about making legacy gifts, contact our office at (269) 405-1006.





# 2025 SPRING STEWARDSHIP WORK DAYS

## **Invasive Control at Grand Beach Marsh Preserve**

Sat. April 12

10 AM - Noon ET

Join COL in controlling invasive shrubs throughout the many habitats protected at this 11-acre preserve located in Grand Beach, MI.

## **Invasive Control at Leonard Wildlife Preserve**

Sat. May 10

10 AM - Noon ET

Help us continue to restore native habitat by removing invasives at one of our largest preserves located in Union Pier, MI.

## **Earth Day Work Day Trillium Woodlands Preserve**

Tues. April 22

10 AM - Noon ET

Come clean up our newest preserve this Earth Day. Removing trash from our this preserve will help create space for the spring wildflowers!

## **Phragmites Spading at Grand Beach Marsh Preserve**

Sat. June 14

10 AM - Noon ET

Check out your progress from our April workday and learn how we remove phragmites from our preserves. This pesky invasive pushes out native wetland plants and soaks up all the water!

**We like to plan ahead! Advance registration for stewardship days is encouraged.**

Contact our Stewardship Manager Dan Engel at [dengel@chikamingopenlands.org](mailto:dengel@chikamingopenlands.org) or call (269) 405-1006 to let us know you're coming. No equipment or experience is required to participate. Just bring sturdy shoes, weather-appropriate clothing, and a positive attitude!

# STORYWALK ON THE PRESERVES

## Take a walk, read a book!

StoryWalk is back for its fifth year. This springtime program is the perfect opportunity to hit the trails with your little ones. Life-sized storybook pages line the hiking trails at Jens Jensen, Myron Perlman, Robinson Woods, Turtle Creek, and Trillium Ravine Preserves. As you hike, read along with each story along the trail. At the end of your hike, be sure to scan the QR code for a chance to win all five StoryWalk books!



## What is StoryWalk's story?

StoryWalk is a worldwide initiative to bring storytime outside and increase visibility for our libraries. The concept was designed in 2007 by Anne Ferguson and Rachel Senechal with the Kellogg-Hubbard Library. Reaching across the United States and 13 additional countries, StoryWalk engages thousands of readers each year.



## How does it work?

Each book is selected by our library partners at Bridgman Public Library, Buchanan District Library, New Buffalo Township Library, Three Oaks Township Library, and Niles District Library. No registration is required to participate—just head out and hike!

Special thanks to our StoryWalk sponsor, **Horizon Bank** New Buffalo.

# SPRING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

## **Good Bat Neighbor Presentation**

Thurs. March 20  
4 - 5:30 PM ET

University of Chicago  
Field Station

Join us on the first day of  
spring as we learn about  
how to be better neighbors  
to our bats!

## **Gallery Hike**

Sat. April 26

1 - 3 PM ET

Robinson Woods

Preserve

Winning photographs from  
COL photography  
competitions will be  
displayed along the hiking  
trails at Robinson Woods  
Preserve, transforming it into  
an outdoor art gallery. We're  
proud to feature this event  
as part of Harbor Country's  
Art Attack 2025!

## **Build A Bug Hotel**

Thurs. May 2

6 - 7:30 PM ET

Buchanan District  
Library

Bugs need homes too! Learn  
all about bugs during an  
educational presentation,  
then build your very own bug  
hotel to take home. This  
event is targeted toward  
families with children.

## **Queen Bee Ephemeral Hike**

Thurs. May 15

10 - 11:30 AM ET

Trillium Woodlands

Preserve

Come explore this magical  
Trillium Woodlands Preserve  
in search of queen bees with  
expert Logan Rowe. We will  
learn about the importance  
of early spring food sources  
and net bees for the  
Michigan Bumble Bee Atlas.



## **Events and programs require pre-registration.**

Please contact our Education & Outreach Coordinator  
Grace at [gball@chikamingopenlands.org](mailto:gball@chikamingopenlands.org) for  
registration information. To view the full events  
calendar, visit [chikamingopenlands.org/events](http://chikamingopenlands.org/events) or scan  
the QR code on this page using your cell phone camera.





# WILDFLOWER WATCH



Flowers are some of the first splashes of color that emerge along the trails in COL's preserves each spring. We call them spring ephemerals, which is just a fancy way of describing plants that bloom for a short period during the spring. These plants are often the first signs of life to emerge after a long winter, some even making an appearance with snow still on the ground! Break in that raincoat, slide on some mud boots, and hit the trails to see how many spring ephemerals you can find!



**Jack-in-the-pulpit**  
(*Arisaema triphyllum*)



**Snowdrop**  
(*Galanthus nivalis*)



**Yellow Trout Lily**  
(*Erythronium americanum*)



**Yellow Marsh Marigold**  
(*Caltha palustris*)



**Mayapple**  
(*Podophyllum peltatum*)



# Chikaming Open Lands

12291 Red Arrow Highway

Sawyer, MI 49125

(269) 405-1006

[chikamingopenlands.org](http://chikamingopenlands.org)



NON-PROFIT ORG.

U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**

SAWYER, MI

PERMIT NO.1